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Memorandum for:

This memorandum was prepared at the request of the Vice President in the wake of Trudeau's unexpected resignation on 29 February 1984.

3 March 1984

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Director,

E U R A

Office of European Analysis

EUR M 84-10034

1 March 1984

MEMORANDUM

Trudeau's Retirement

Trudeau's unexpected decision to resign as Liberal Party leader and prime minister, announced on 29 February, lends an air of uncertainty to the Canadian political system which will take several months to resolve. His impending departure from the domestic and international stages after a nearly twenty-year run raises a number of questions. []

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1. Why did Trudeau decide to resign? []

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As is the case with most decisions by the enigmatic Trudeau, the motivation for his decision to leave office at this time is unclear. After he was reelected in 1980, he pledged not to run again but left open when he might exit. During the early 1980s, through about mid-1983, Trudeau seemed to become more and more disenchanted with holding office, suggesting that he might cut short his stay. Since the Williamsburg Summit, however, his renewed zest for the political wars had fueled speculation that he would contest one more election. We believe that Trudeau made his decision only last weekend and did so more for personal than political reasons. Among the motivating factors probably were a general weariness with public life, a desire to return to his home in Montreal and educate his three sons in that city, and a feeling that he had accomplished those goals that had caused him to enter politics in 1965 -- i.e., establishing Canada as an officially bilingual country and severing Canada's last colonial ties with Britain by ending London's technical control of the Canadian constitution. []

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2. What exactly does Trudeau's announcement mean? []

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In a letter to the Liberal Party president, Trudeau announced his intention to retire as party leader as soon as the party selects a replacement for him. The party president has said publicly that she favors a late June leadership convention to select Trudeau's replacement. In Canada, the leader of the majority party automatically becomes prime minister -- if he holds a seat in Parliament. When Trudeau announced that he was quitting the post of party chief, he was in effect resigning as prime minister. []

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3. Does Trudeau's announcement have any immediate bearing on his position as prime minister? [redacted]

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Trudeau's decision to resign as party leader does not immediately affect his status as prime minister. Trudeau probably will remain prime minister at least until a new leader is selected and perhaps longer. If the Liberal leadership convention in June selects an individual who does not hold a seat in Parliament -- for example, the current favorite, John Turner, does not now hold a seat -- that person would not be able to become prime minister until he wins a seat. [redacted]

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When a new party leader is chosen in June, we expect Trudeau to resign as prime minister and allow that individual to assume center stage in the public's eye. In the case of John Turner, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs Allan MacEachen would perform the prime minister's duties in a caretaker role until Turner won a seat. If the leadership convention selects an individual who already holds a seat, he would be able to become prime minister immediately upon Trudeau's resignation. [redacted]

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4. What influence does Trudeau's decision have on the timing of the next general election in Canada? [redacted]

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Under the Canadian constitution, each parliament is elected for a five-year term but the prime minister can call an election at any point during that period. The last election was held in February 1980 and the present Parliament's term does not expire until February 1985. A federal election, therefore, need not legally be called before then. [redacted]

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Because the leader of the majority party in Parliament automatically becomes prime minister, the resignation of one leader and the subsequent selection of a new leader in no way requires that a general election be called. [redacted]

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We believe that whoever succeeds Trudeau as the next Liberal leader will not call an immediate general election but will hold office long enough for the public to identify him as prime minister. In our opinion, the next federal election is not likely to be held before this fall. [redacted]

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5. What will Trudeau do in the period until his retirement as party leader and prime minister? [redacted]

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Perhaps the most surprising aspect of Trudeau's announcement is his decision to remain on the scene as more or less a lame duck, his powers as party leader and prime minister still undiminished but the end of his regime clearly in sight. His resignation as party leader after the Liberal defeat in the 1979 election stands in distinct contrast to the current scenario. In 1979, Trudeau barely settled into the the opposition leader's chair when he unexpectedly tendered his resignation and drove off, on the same day, for his home in Montreal. [redacted]

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We believe that Trudeau would not tarry unless he had some definite ideas about what he hopes to accomplish during his remaining months in office. In our opinion, there are several things that he may put his energies to in the coming months. Domestically, he probably will seek to secure the protection of French language rights in Manitoba. The Conservative opposition there recently blocked the adoption of an amendment to the provincial constitution which would have provided such protection. [REDACTED]

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Trudeau probably will devote most of his activities between now and the end of June to the field of international relations. While he has said that his personal involvement in the Canadian peace initiative would taper off now that he has been to Moscow, Trudeau may now feel free to speak more frequently in open public forums on such sensitive topics as disarmament, NATO affairs, and North-South relations. [REDACTED]

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If Trudeau pursues this course, we believe that he probably would feel less constrained in issuing criticisms -- including some directed at US policies -- or in suggesting controversial ideas than he had been before he decided to resign. Trudeau probably would characterize his comments as an individual's views -- possibly "public musings" of the type he delivered at Davos, Switzerland, in January. He therefore would not be committing his government or party irrevocably to any specific policies. [REDACTED]

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Despite his apparent willingness to don the mantle of elder statesman, Trudeau may still -- given his well-honed skill for acting on the international stage and drawing a considerable audience in the process -- be able to garner a significant amount of media attention. In this light, his decision to remain on the scene through the end of June suggests that he views the London Economic Summit as his last chance to have any significant influence on ameliorating the state of East-West relations. [REDACTED]

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6. Who is in line to succeed Trudeau? [REDACTED]

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Although there are at least seven individuals who appear ready to enter the race for the Liberal leadership, the following two are, in our judgment, the favorites at this point. [REDACTED]

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- John Turner - This fluently bilingual Toronto lawyer and businessman, who was a minister in Trudeau's government from 1968 to 1975, probably is Trudeau's most likely successor at this point. He resigned as Finance Minister in 1975 because of a disagreement with Trudeau over federal economic policy. Turner has maintained widespread contacts within the party and across the country since his resignation and reportedly has a campaign organization largely in place. Turner is an economic conservative and would likely lead the Liberal Party in a direction that would be markedly less interventionist and nationalist. [REDACTED]

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- Jean Chretien - Currently Minister of Energy, Chretien has performed well in a wide variety of cabinet posts. As energy minister, he has restored a significant measure of peace to the troubled relationship between Ottawa and the private energy sector that resulted from the introduction of the National Energy Program (NEP) in 1980. Popular throughout the country, the amiable, ambitious Chretien has been viewed traditionally as a superb subordinate but a bit short in leadership ability.

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The other five contenders -- in descending order of likelihood to win the leadership -- are:

- John Roberts - Minister of Employment and Immigration, powerful in the politically crucial province of Ontario, and a harsh critic of US environmental policy.
- Allan MacEachen - External Affairs Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and a master of parliamentary legerdemain and obfuscation. He probably is crippled by lingering resentment in the party over the politically and economically maladroit budget he introduced as Minister of Finance in 1981.
- Donald Johnston - Minister of Economic Development, Science, and Technology and the most economically conservative, and least nationalistic, Liberal in the present government. Johnston is respected in party circles but has little popular support outside his Montreal constituency.
- Mark MacGuigan - Minister of Justice and a rather colorless individual whose ambition probably exceeds his ability.
- Gerald Regan - Minister of International Trade and probably the Liberal most well disposed to the United States. At this time, however, he is the darkest of all the horses in the leadership race.

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All these candidates have been in Trudeau governments and to some extent have been tarnished in the public eye by their association. Turner, because he has been out of politics since 1975, probably would be best able to portray himself as a fresh face, able to instill new vigor in the tired Liberal Party. Even Turner, however, who has been waiting in the wings since being defeated by Trudeau in the last Liberal leadership race in 1968, probably would be unable to give the party enough of a revitalized image.

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[REDACTED]

In our opinion, therefore, the next Liberal leader will be selected primarily for his ability to limit the degree of the defeat the party now expects to suffer in the next election. We believe, at this time, that John Turner best fits that description and probably will be the individual chosen to lead the Liberals into opposition. [REDACTED]

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7. What effect will Trudeau's departure have on the electoral prospects of Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservative Party? [REDACTED]

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The Liberals probably will benefit in the polls from the excitement surrounding Trudeau's retirement, the increased public interest caused by the leadership convention, and the highly publicized installation of a new leader. The gain, however, may be short-lived. Polls consistently have shown that Canadians are weary of 20 years of nearly unbroken Liberal rule. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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